

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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June 13, 2006

Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr. (Ret.)
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
U.S. Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
14th Street & Constitution Avenue NW
Room 5128
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Admiral Lautenbacher:

We are writing in response to continuing concerns we have heard about scientific communications at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Leaving aside the extent to which these concerns are valid, the mere fact that they continue can hurt the credibility of the agency and your ability to attract the best scientists.

We know that NOAA has a policy on communication that is generally well regarded and that the Department of Commerce is in the process of developing a Department-wide policy. We know that you have issued statements to NOAA employees and the public reiterating your own commitment to open scientific communication. These are important steps that have set the right tone and have been a model for other agencies, but they are clearly not enough to put concerns to rest.

Therefore, we are writing to urge you to take several important additional steps. First, we believe that NOAA should formally or informally survey its scientists to determine how widespread concerns are and why they are occurring. This would be an important baseline for moving forward, and it would demonstrate genuine concern with the problem. Second, we believe top NOAA staff, including you, must get out to meet with NOAA scientists around the nation to discuss their concerns and your commitment to openness. Third, NOAA must have a clear process in place to enable scientists (or public affairs officers) to express their concerns when they think the commitment to openness is being violated and a process to resolve such concerns.

These additional steps would go a long way to ensuring that NOAA truly exemplifies the principles of openness that you have espoused. There will always be some complaints, fair or not, but there should not be a continuing stream of concerns expressed about openness of communication by scientists.

We look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vernon J. Ehlers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vernon" being the most prominent.

VERNON J. EHLERS
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment,
Technology and Standards

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sherwood Boehlert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sherwood" being the most prominent.

SHERWOOD BOEHLERT
Chairman
Committee on Science